



A QUICK GUIDE TO DEVELOP YOUR OWN
SHORT FILMS

Produced by the University of Saskatchewan Media Production
& the Global Institute for Water Security





CHAPTER 1:

Development





DEVELOPMENT

Development typically involves coming up with a concept and developing your story idea (synopsis, outline, and treatment), writing a script, developing a budget, securing financing and assembling a team.

Synopsis

The synopsis is useful in summarizing the content and message of the film. It should briefly state WHO, WHAT AND HOW. Within the space of two to four sentences, the synopsis should set out whose story it is (the protagonist), what his or her problem is, and how they navigate the problem towards an outcome.

Outline

The outline will define the story and structure of the proposed film, making clear:

- how the story will be told; it is a sketch of your film written to demonstrate the structure. The outline is a statement of intent. The outline can also begin to create the story structure or the breakdown of the film's sections, or acts.
- Sample outlines (simple and more advanced)

Treatment

The treatment will show how the story will be told. It will make clear:

- who or what the film is about; the issue, characters, obstacles and goals of the film.
- the elements or approach you will use to tell the story. Narrative, interviews, animation, photography, stock footage or even poetry are possible styles or methods of delivering the story.
- how the elements or mechanisms will move or evolve through

the story structure.

A bit about PLOT, STORYLINE AND NARRATIVE

Begin with an idea, a theme. The theme is developed into a plot, storyline or narrative. From there a script is written.

A typical three act structure:

1. Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the film. The characters are introduced, the setting is described, the situation is explained or a problem is defined or demonstrated.
2. Approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ of the film. The pace of the story increases, complications arise and tension increases. It is the emotional peak of the story as new information is presented about the characters, the issue or the story.
3. Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of the film. The tension continues through this act, often to the height of intensity. The tension then begins to ease and the issue moves to resolution and conclusion.

Script

Depending on the style of film you are creating, the script could be written in the development phase (drama, performance piece) or after production is complete (documentary) when the narration is built between interviews to move the story along or provide clarification of content.

- [Samples of scripts \(website\)](#)

Storyboards

a sequence of drawings, typically with some directions and dialogue, representing the shots planned for the movie or video.

- [Samples of Storyboards \(pdf\)](#)

DEFINING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Possible roles within your production may include:

- **The Producer** – raises the money, plans the budget and ensures the project moves through the stages of development and production. The producer will help determine the key roles of the production such as Director and other key personnel.
- **Writer** (should I include this role here?)
- **Director** – decides how the film will look, bringing the script to life. The director works with actors and crew members to guide his vision into a finished film.
- **Production manager** – responsible for creating the filming schedule, hiring required crew and the equipment. It is the production managers responsibility to ensure all aspects of the production stay on course, as required by the director's vision.
- **Location manager** – scouts locations required for filming all scenes. Secures any required agreements and ensures everything is ready on location for the scenes to be filmed. This can include table or chairs, areas for crew and equipment, traffic control, garbage cans, safety protocols or sound control.
- **Director of photography** – responsible for the camera and oversees how scenes are shot and lit. His/her team often includes:
 - **Gaffer** – the electrician the is responsible for safe and efficient lighting set up
 - **Best boy**- the assistant to the gaffer
 - **Key grip** – ensures the camera and all other gear gets on set and into position
- **Location audio** – ensure that all the equipment required to gather audio is on set. Monitors the audio that is recorded on set to ensure it is of the highest quality, without disturbing noises from within or outside the set.
- **Art Director/production designer** – brings the visual aspect of the director's vision to life. The art director works with the location manager to find the right locations for every scene and works with his/her crew to ensure all props, furniture or decorations are on set.
- **Hair, makeup and wardrobe** – ensures all character are looking their best, or as they are required to appear based on the director's vision.